

# Knowledge: force multiplier, life enhancer

By SFC Arthur V. Jones, ADA

**I**n today's Army, there has been a new surge in the initiative of education. Soldiers need to be smarter and more skilled on a constantly changing battlefield. The way Soldiers train, learn and ultimately react on the battlefield has evolved.

The Army's recent education initiative gives Soldiers the skills they need to survive in hostile environments. In addition, Soldiers have numerous opportunities to better themselves through military and civilian education, better preparing for the future.

**NCOES restructuring.** 2009 is "The Year of the NCO." Appropriately enough, the NCO Education System is integrating various changes to its curriculum. We see these changes taking place in the various schools of the NCO Education System.

The Primary Leadership Development Course has evolved into the Warrior Leader Course. Soldiers who attend the Warrior Leader Course receive classroom instruction and a hands-on evaluation of their demonstrated and potential leadership. Many installations have reduced the course length to 15 days to accommodate units that are deploying. Soldiers receive evaluations in both garrison and tactical environments at the squad and team leader levels.

The Basic NCO Course and the Advanced NCO Course also underwent various changes. In the past, the Basic NCO Course focused its leadership evaluations on the squad level, and the Advanced NCO Course concentrated on a platoon sergeant's duties.

Now, numerous NCOs are serving in positions of greater responsibility, well above their pay grade and rank. The Basic NCO Course has transitioned to the Advanced Leadership Course. The Advanced NCO Course has changed to Senior Leadership Course.

**TOP:** A drill sergeant shows a Soldier his shot grouping at a zeroing range. (Fires Archive)  
**BOTTOM:** A U.S. Soldier talks an Afghan National Army soldier through zeroing target efforts during basic rifle marksmanship training, Feb. 11. (Photo by TSgt. Jill LaVoie, U.S. Air Force)



## Education transformation

The length of the Advanced Leadership and Senior Leadership Courses vary according to the career management fields. The Advanced Leadership Course now focuses on squad and platoon leadership, and the Senior Leadership Course includes first sergeant tasks. Although the First Sergeant Course is taught at the Sergeants Major Academy and via distance learning, Senior Leadership Course students will be introduced to some of the most critical first sergeant tasks. Based on a Fort Sill, Okla., Fires Center of Excellence NCO Academy initiative, all Senior Leadership Course small group instructors attend the First Sergeant Course to learn, and thereby teach the material, giving them greater credibility to their students.

**O**utcome based training and education. How Soldiers are trained also is changing. Until recently, it was thought that training the Soldier through vast repetition was the absolute best way to train. Soldiers were given the task, condition and standard. If one could not achieve the standard, the individual retrained until the given standard was met. Through constant repetition, Soldiers “learned” how to accomplish the task and got a “go” for the training.

This methodology worked well enough in static conditions, but what happens when the conditions change? Just because Soldiers repeated a task did not necessarily mean that they understood the “why” aspect of it.

“Knowing is not enough, we must apply,” said Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a German novelist and playwright. This quote perfectly describes the goals of Outcome Based Training and Education. The new methodology is to create a Soldier who is proficient in a task, but also can rapidly adapt to a changing situation.

This methodology focuses on the fundamentals through repetition and challenges the Soldier to use critical thinking skills when the situation changes. Soldiers are allowed to make mistakes and go back and look at why they made them, giving them a greater understanding of the task. This gives the Soldier greater flexibility to react to any scenario and allows the Soldier to develop the critical skill of being able to think under stress and during a changing environment.

The Army’s Asymmetric Warfare Group instructs the Combat Application Training Course in an effort to introduce Soldiers to the Outcome Based Training and Education methodology. In my experience, I honestly can say I was slightly wary of this new way of teaching. However, my opinion changed when I had the opportunity to attend the Combat Application Training Course.

This course is designed to fortify the fundamentals of rifle marksmanship in the Soldier’s mind. It’s five days long and focuses on tasks not taught during basic rifle marksmanship. However, the fundamentals are stressed continually during the training. Soldiers learn how to mount reflexive scopes and lasers and how to rig their rifles with combat ready slings.

Although the instructors give examples and recommendations of what works for them, it is up to the Soldier to find out what works best for him individually. Other nontraditional aspects of the Combat Application Training Course include teaching method of angle and multiple zeros at different distances. At the end of the training, most Soldiers have a greater confidence in their ability to fire their weapons.

The instructor’s role is also significantly different as he no longer gives the student the correct answer, but guides his thoughts to stimulate the thinking process. Because the Soldier understands the fundamentals, he can master the skill set. The Soldier, in effect, becomes confident and accountable for his own training.

This new teaching methodology is taking many forms in many classrooms, to include classes at the Fires Center of Excellence NCO Academy. For example, the Virtual Experience Immersive Learning Simulations give Soldiers a chance to role play various characters in leadership positions. During these simulations, the Soldier experiences different scenarios, requiring the Soldier to make decisions as he progresses through the program. After the Soldier makes a decision, the program provides feedback, and he has a chance to repeat each scenario.

According to WILL Interactive, the company behind the simulator, Virtual Experience Immersive Learning Simulations “replaces the passive ‘teach by telling’” approach with an active “learn by doing” model based on how people naturally internalize information and make behavior choices. At the end of the training, the instructors can discuss with the students why and how decisions were made to enhance the overall learning process further.

**C**ivilian educational opportunities. The Army is also making it easier for Soldiers to attend college courses to earn a degree through information at its GoArmyEd Web site. According to GoArmyEd.com, “All active duty Soldiers (officers, warrant officers, enlisted) are authorized to participate in the [tuition assistance] program through the GoArmyEd

portal (subject to qualifying criteria). This includes members of the Army National Guard, as well as U.S. Army Reserves component Soldiers who are activated under U.S. Code Title 10 or Title 32.” Once registered, Soldiers have various options to earn a degree while still serving.

Through the program, Soldiers receive \$4,500 annually for tuition assistance to attend institutes of higher learning, either actively in the classroom or online through the Internet. This annual stipend covers most, if not all costs incurred by the Soldier, and he pays minimal money out-of-pocket. The money works like a grant, and the only caveat is a Soldier must earn passing grades. In many instances, the chain of command can insist the tuition assistance money be paid back if the Soldier fails to complete their courses or earn passing grades. However, if the Soldier chooses to use the tuition assistance program, their Montgomery G.I. Bill still remains in effect for when the Soldier separates from the service.

By using the tuition assistance program, in some instances, Soldiers can earn multiple degrees before they reach retirement. Earning a degree gives the Soldier a competitive edge for promotion and almost guarantees a higher salary when the Soldier leaves active duty.

The training the Army provides its Soldiers always has been top notch as demonstrated in past and present conflicts. Education and training coupled with new technologies make our Army the greatest in the world. As a constantly evolving and ever-changing Army, Soldiers need adaptive training to survive in today’s unpredictable operational environment. Training always has been one of an NCO’s paramount responsibilities. As NCOs we owe our Soldiers the absolute best training; this translates to success on the battlefield and success in life. ■

**Sergeant First Class Arthur V. Jones, air defense artillery, is a small group instructor for the Air Defense Artillery Senior Leadership Course at the Fires Center of Excellence NCO Academy, Fort Sill, Okla. He also has taught the Warrior Leader Course Fort Sill, Okla. He has served in multiple leadership positions including fire control platoon sergeant and headquarters platoon sergeant for B Battery, 1st Battalion, 7th Air Defense Artillery, Fort Bliss, Texas, as well as a radar section chief and senior engagement controller for A Battery, 2-1 ADA Fort Bliss, Texas. SFC Jones served in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom as a senior controller, for A Battery 2-1 Air Defense Artillery, Fort Bliss, Texas.**